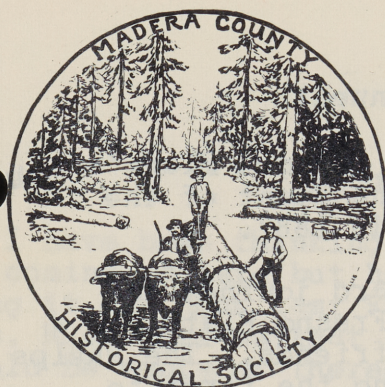


# THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

MADERA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY



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October, 1964

## JANE BROWN'S MOUNTAIN VACATION

INTRODUCTION BY NATHAN C. SWEET

This 1882 account of a stage journey and mountain vacation is taken from the author's Garden Scrap Book which she started in her Canadian home near Toronto, 13 July 1875, and brought to Madera when she came West with her brother, Dr. C. Edgar Brown, and his wife, Matilda (Tilly) Ann Gilmore Brown, upon their return home from a Brown family reunion in 1881.

Dr. Edgar died in April, 1882. Thereupon Dr. Frank Brown, with wife Julia and daughter Agnes, moved to Madera from Millville, Shasta County to continue his brother's practice and assist the widow with her drugstore.

The stage departed from Yosemite Hotel, now in its fifth year of operation, located across the street from the Madera railroad station. The owner, Captain R. P. Mace, was agent for Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Company as well as mail stages leaving for other destinations.

The party consisted of Jane, Mrs. Mace (Matilda's mother) the two Mace daughters Mamie and Ina, and youngest son Russie. Willie, the oldest Mace boy, joined the party later. Harry Chapman, Russie's playmate, was also included. He was the son of local businessman and rancher E. W. Chapman.

Also on the stage that morning were Robert Stitt and brother bound

for Stitt's Adobe Ranch about nine miles east of Madera and the first "change" station. The ranch was named for the adobe trading post built in the winter of 1851-52 by Samuel Bishop for Major James D. Savage and his partners and called Fort Bishop. This building is still in use and I believe is the oldest in Madera County.

The second "change" station was Dustin's, recently acquired by them from George Green, located on the old road a short distance from the Blackhawk Motel on modern Highway 41. During 1877 and 1878, C. H. Dustin and Company of Madera operated a tri-weekly mail stage from Madera via Firebaugh's Ferry on the San Joaquin River to Gilroy.

James Douglas was a relative of Betty Douglas O'Neal whose husband, Charles O'Neal purchased the Gilmore-Mace ranch in 1878. It was about four miles east of the stage station and had been Mrs. Mace's home for 19 years. Long called O'Neal's, it was a way-station on the road from Fresno to North Fork on the upper San Joaquin River.

The "dinner stop" hotel in Coarse Gold was operated by John Krohn. The St. Charles, it was built by Michaels and Krohn in 1880, the year the stage road was completed. Michaels died in February, 1882, on the very night that



## MOUNTAIN VACATION - INTRODUCTION (Continued)

Captain Mace was acting as "master-of-ceremonies" of a hotel function.

The road now ascended to the summit of Potter Ridge and then dropped down to the valley and hamlet of Fresno Flats, modern Oakhurst. After a pause for a change of horses another ascent was made to Burford's Station. The owner, R. T. Burford, was an attorney with an office at the copper mining town of Buchanan on the Stockton to Millerton stage road between the Chowchilla and Fresno Rivers, now so thoroughly a "ghost town" that almost no trace remains.

The vacated station after Burford's was at the Branch ranch, somewhere near the present-day Westfall Ranger Station. Arriving at Big Tree Station, their destination, in the gloaming, they then rested for several days. The hotel was founded by Galen Clark and known as Clark's ranch for many years. A junction of roads from Madera, Mariposa, Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Sequoias, it was owned and operated by the Washburn brothers.

In the valley of the south fork of the Merced River, elevation 4000 feet, the hotel is very much the same today as it was then, known now as Wawona. Harry Chapman's father was an early partner of the Washburns.

The Mrs. Jones and daughter with whom Jane conversed and played cards were probably the wife and daughter of Judge L. F. Jones of Mariposa, grandmother and aunt of Mrs. H. Clay Daulton of Madera.

After Jane bid her old diary good-night she appears to have omitted several days, leaving out all reference to their trip to Yosemite and picking up again just as they were leaving. Her mention of their host, Mr. Cook, indicates that they stayed at Black's hotel in the Valley. Dr. Russell (100 YEARS IN YOSEMITE) says

that J. J. Cook managed Black's prior to his management of the Stoneman House in 1887.

On the homeward journey the party stops at Fresno Flats for a visit with old friends. The Phelps family were among the first to settle in Madera. In August of 1878 the Fresno Expositor mentions that N. D. Phelps of Madera has placed a stock of goods at Fresno Flats in charge of Robert Laramore. He soon sold his interest in the store to J. Wesley Smith and became interested in mining. In January, 1880 he was reported putting in an arrastra on the extension of the Enterprise Lode about five miles below Fresno Flats on the Fresno River.

Willie Mace went up to the saw-mill at Soquel, about 10 miles northeast of the Flats. The Johnnie mentioned was probably John Gilmore, Mrs. Mace's stepson, who had returned to Fresno County from Mariposa the first of the year. This may have been the beginning of a courtship as Jane Brown became Mrs. Gilmore later.

The speaker whom she hears was W. D. Grady, law partner of Reel and David S. Terry, elected District Attorney of Fresno County in 1880 and now campaigning for a second term.

Mrs. Mace stayed at the Nichols' house and called on Mrs. Laramore and Mrs. Taylor. The ladies were sisters as was also Mrs. R. T. Burford of the stage station mentioned earlier. They were the four daughters of William Fletcher Newton and Mary DeWitt Newton, Virginians who had emigrated to Missouri and then in 1851 crossed the plains, ending their journey at Millerton where mother and daughters operated a hotel while the father hauled freight from Stockton. Later they moved to Buchanan.

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## JANE BROWN'S MOUNTAIN VACATION

Sunday

August 20th, 1882

I have been thinking for some time of coming up here but have kept putting it off, but last Friday evening Mrs. Mace told us that as the stage would be empty or thereabouts we had better come the next day, so of course we were all thrown into a state of hurry and excitement packing up and preparing for an early start. Mrs. Mace and I had to go down town to make one or two small purchases then we had to pack our valises and of course in the hurry forgot some important things.

Next morning I did not awake until six when I hurried round to make my toilet, thinking that time was scarce but Ina came down and said the train was late and we were going to wait so I became more leisurely in my preparations and was composedly taking my time when the Dr. told me that the stage was not going to wait for the train and it was ready to start out, and here I had not tasted breakfast so I went over to the hotel immediately and found that I had time to eat breakfast comfortably. The other members of the party were all ready and had gone in to the table.

After breakfast and some small delays we, that is Mrs. Mace, Mamie, Russie, Ina and myself started out. Besides ourselves there was Mr. Robt. Stitt as far as the adobe and his brother from there, a lady passenger to Fresno Flats, and a little playfellow for Russie named Harry Chapman.

We started from Madera about seven, all our folks being out on the porch to bid us goodbye and see us off all even to sweet little Aggie, and Dr. and Julia have promised that if it is altogether practicable they will join us up here and go into the Valley with us. Wouldn't it be splendid though if only they could! And perhaps Tillie would come along with them.

Over the plains there was a pleasant breeze that carried all the dust away so that it did not trouble but as we entered the foothills there would be a sandy spot here and there where the wind had not much play and there we had dust in plenty.

As we sped over that first upwards of twenty miles of road my mind sped back to the first time I traversed it when we went to the "Basin" in search of health and an appetite for me more than a year ago when I was still a stranger in Cal, then to a time later on when Doc and I went over the road and he pointed out different way marks so that I might travel it alone if necessary, then when I first went to my school, and afterwards to the time when old Gipsy and I traversed and retraversed it all alone, then my mind pictured that first stage trip in Cal for me, how happy we all were in spite of being tired with the previous night's dissipation; and as we neared home and my eyes got heavy with sleep Doc drew my head onto his shoulder and there it rested for miles, that was the second and last time he and I went over it together. O Edgar! If I could only see you once more my brother!

At Dustin's station I saw James Douglas. He came out for the mail bag and shook hands, and a few minutes later came and offered his hand again saying that his hands were so full before he could not shake hands. He is looking quite well but says O'Neil's children have the whooping cough.

At Coarse Gold we took dinner. The hotel there looks as fresh and clean as a new pin. From this place the scenery got wilder all the time. At Fresno Flats we lost the lady passenger before mentioned and we saw



## JANE BROWN'S MOUNTAIN VACATION (Continued)

Gallop (?) at the hotel there. He said, "This is a wild country. I would not live here for ten thousand dollars." The lady that left us at the Flats expressed a similar opinion. She said, "I would not have the whole country from the Flats to the Station as a gift if obliged to live in it." But her objection seemed to be the difficulty in getting a physician in time of illness and other similar difficulties.

Some distance above Fresno Flats the air was noticeably cooler and the scenery wilder and more picturesque all the time. At one time winding round a mountain with a steep declivity on one side and the mountain rising high on the other, now on top of a mountain with a wide view over the surrounding country of hill and dale, now flying down hill curving and twisting round, now at the very bottom of a deep gorge with precipitous mountains on either hand, the scene ever varying. It was delightful, but I could not help wishing that we were going by private conveyance so that we could stop where we chose and get the full benefit of nature's beauties.

Riding made Ina a little tired so as there was plenty of room she lay on a seat with her head in her Mama's lap and took it easy. Mamie did not quite enjoy some of the rough places, wondering occasionally how much of us would be left by the time we reached the Station. The jolting was a little hard on Mrs. Mace but I think she enjoyed the trip thoroughly, tho' now and again when we came to an unusually rough place she would remark how very glad she was that the Capt. did not listen to our solicitations of the evening before and accompany us as she was sure he could not have stood the trip, and I rather agreed with her as it bruised me up pretty well, light and thin as I am.

The buildings where there used to be a station at this side of Burfords

are all broken by the weight of the winter's snow and there are no horses there now so we did not have a fresh relay of horses until four or five miles from the Station, then we made those few miles in lively time, the horses traveling through and we drove up at the hotel just in the gloaming, feeling pretty tired.

We washed our faces, took supper, wrote a few lines to Madera and retired, slept soundly, and rose so as to take breakfast at about half past eight. Russie and Harry, however, were up early.

After breakfast we took a walk and went down to the river and I commenced writing this sketch in the shade of the trees where the wind in the woods and the waters coursing down the hillside made a perfect roar.

Mrs. Mace came up with the children before I did. As noon time came I came up also. We went in and ate a hearty dinner, spent a little time in the parlors and now I am in my room taking a short rest as I have not quite gotten over the effects of yesterday's staging.

August 21st

Went to bed early last night intending to get a good night's rest and get up early this morning, but it seems that "hope" as well as "pride" must sometimes have a fall. I was just dozing off when someone commenced playing and singing and it was kept up for two or three hours. Oh, how I longed to turn the hose on some of the rascals and have a little variety in the tune instead of that dismal drone, but it was not to be. They were in a free country and exercised their prerogative with a vengeance.

One of the boys called me early this morning to go fishing, and between seven and eight o'clock we, that is Russie, Harry, an old man &



## JANE BROWN'S MOUNTAIN VACATION (Continued)

myself started off down the Merced River in search of fish. We followed the river, or more properly the bed of the river, for we walked down stream on the stones as far as where it is joined by Big Creek, then we went up the latter for a distance, but the waters were so boisterous on account of the rocks and it was so very difficult to get along, that as no fish were visible we turned back to the Merced and followed its course again for some distance but to no purpose. The only fish caught was one that Russie pulled out much to his satisfaction. We went a good distance and fished very industriously but had to give up at last and returned about noon to the hotel where we found Mrs. Mace, Mamie and Ina all looking rosy and happy and quite ready to smile at our nonsuccess, but as we were as ready to smile as they having had the benefit of the morning exercise their teasing did not amount to much.

I changed my dress and went into dinner when I practiced a little on the piano, then Mamie, Russie, Harry and I had a game of Casino while Mrs. Mace went to Mrs. Miller's room. Then Mrs. Mace, Mrs. Jones and I had some conversation, then I had a pleasant chat with Miss Jones. Next came supper which we enjoyed and we spent the evening in a game of Euchre, Mrs. Mace, Miss Jones and myself, three games all of which I got, then we played a game or two of Pedro and said goodnight and betook ourselves to our rooms, taking notice on our way to a fire in the mountains that showed off to great advantage. Now I am all ready for bed and jotting down my daily entry before betaking myself to bed slumbers.

There is a peculiar couple at the hotel here, a Mr. B. and Mrs. A. His wife is high up in the mountains on a pleasure trip and her husband is working in a mine while this delectable couple are enjoying one another's society, he far more attentive than lovers ordinarily are, taking

care of the baby and paying every attention to her. After the child was asleep they went out for a moonlight ramble.

There is another very devoted couple, Mr. J. W. and Miss H. Another character that I rather like to take note of is Mary, our ancient maiden lady from the green isle of Erin, who officiates here in the capacity of chambermaid. Then I think I must mention the waiter, a young gentleman who takes such little quick steps that he always gives the impression that he is very swift, but alas! the result does not tally with the impression as we find out to our sorrow sometimes when we sit down with keen appetites that are very eager to be satisfied. But old diary goodnight.

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We were called up at five o'clock this morning and made preparations for leaving the Valley. Mr. Cook, our host, said that his wife was better this morning. Willie went with the mail carrier. The rest of us, with five other passengers, took the stage. The two lady passengers besides ourselves sat with the driver, two of the gents occupied the back seat, the other the seat next to the back with Mrs. Mace and Ina.

As we took our last look at the Valley and left it, as our visit, no longer a present reality but a bright spot in the garden of memory, the conversation gradually turned from the wonders of Yosemite to other topics. Yosemite was pronounced grand in itself, but the way the money was extracted from the pockets of poor tourists was denounced as an outrageous fraud. One of the gents present said he had travelled with Englishmen and they are so overcharged that one would have to pay a dollar or two a day more than himself. From this they were comparing the language and government of England and the



## JANE BROWN'S MOUNTAIN VACATION (Continued)

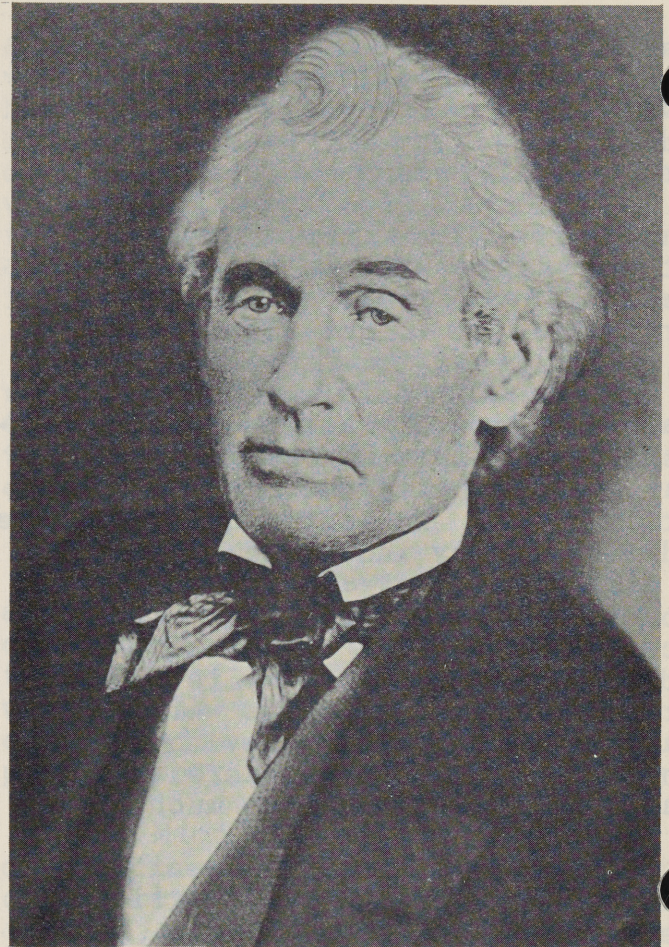
States, and these three wiseacres united in the opinion that the Americans, as a people, spoke far better English than the English. They agreed that the Queen was one of the noblest and best women on record and that the English were a glorious nation and had done more for humanity and for the civilization of the world at large than any other people, but the Americans were the most brilliant race, they had whipped the British twice and could do it now far better than ever before. But the British were a fine people and their laws were executed with equity and the officers were not corrupt like those of this nation, and so on.

And so the time rolled on very pleasantly taken altogether, and about ten o'clock we got here (at Fresno Flats).

Mrs. Mace, Willie and Ina got out at Nichols, Mamie and I at Phelps' where we found Mrs. Phelps and her little boy all alone, and she gave us a cordial greeting. Mamie stayed with Mrs. Phelps until Monday morning and then went to see what had become of the rest of the party and found that Willie had gone up to the Mill on Sunday evening and Mrs. Mace was thinking of going over to Mrs. Phelps'.

Finding Mrs. Davis, a music teacher, at Nichols I made up my mind to take a few lessons and took my first that morning and stayed there to dinner. After my return Mrs. Mace went to Laramore's taking Ina with her and leaving May at Nichols. The next day she went to Taylors..

When I was at my practicing Mamie told me that Johnie and Willie had passed driving like mad, and in the afternoon Johnie called to see me. Willie brought Mrs. Mace and came later on. Johnie did not return to the Mill until after night. He was hoarse and breathed hard but accounted for it by driving ox team. He wanted Willie to go back with him but he did



WILLIAM FLETCHER NEWTON

Born March 14, 1800

Died April 9, 1875

Buried at Oak Hill, Oakhurst

From the collection of Betty Wyman, great, great granddaughter of William Fletcher Newton.

not and next morning Willie, Ina and their mother returned home; Mamie is to go next Sunday.

I went to hear Grady speak this evening. There was to be a ball after but I did not stay to it. Mrs. Phelps thought I was going to spend the night at Nichols but instead of going there Mr. Phelps brought me back to their house as I was not afraid of staying alone and then he returned to the ball. She will be astonished when she comes home and finds me in bed.

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October 19, 1964

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## MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

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